NOVA SCOTIA

# Emergency Measures Organization

## 2003 Annual Report

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# Emergency Measures Organization (Nova Scotia)

## Foreword

The year 2003 will undoubtedly be long remembered, but not fondly by the staff of EMO (NS)! An increased awareness and enthusiasm continued in the wake of September 11, 2001 with senior levels of government supporting the concept of a superior level of preparedness and response resulting in an over-powering demand for emergency preparedness training. For the first three months of 2003, we were optimistic that we would be able to make greater strides than ever before.

The April Fool's Flood, affected virtually the entire Province and before we were able to address the majority of disaster financial applications, Hurricane Juan arrived on September 28th and blew any aspirations of proactivity away.

Perhaps the most pressing challenge though for our small EMO team of seven permanent staff, was the corporate memory loss through the retirement of Bill Weagle and the acceptance of promotional opportunities elsewhere by John Perkins and Rose Marie de Villers. We were pleased to welcome Adam Rostis to our staff and the disaster financial assistance file.

There is no doubt that we at EMO (NS) would like to see our luck improve for 2004; however, our challenges of 2003 seem rather insignificant when compared to the current news stories of the earthquake in Iran and the mudslides in California. We should probably consider ourselves fortunate.

Respectfully submitted,

M. R. Lester
Executive Director EMO (NS)

## The April Fool's Flood

This storm was no joke and it was obvious from its start on March 31, 2003, that we were going to have major damage as a result of widespread flooding across the Province and we did! Two lives were lost when a senior couple were swept away in their vehicle, when they tried to cross a flooded highway. Bridges were not only swept away, but some appeared to be tied in knots, when they were deposited downstream.

The farming community was hard hit by normally peaceful brooks and streams; which transformed into raging torrents of water that ruined fields or made it impossible to access them, and this at the beginning of the growing season. This was Nova Scotia's first real experience with the Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements (DFAA) and the farming community. But there is little doubt that the current DFAA is insufficient to address the needs of farmers, who have been victimized by a disaster. DFAA has been "under review" for approximately eight years and it is high time that it was fixed.

April Fool's Flood Damage Estimates:
Insurance Industry - $14 million
Provincial DFAA Program - $8 million
Number of DFAA Applications - 828

## Hurricane "Juan"

"It's not going to hit here!" That seemed to be the prevailing attitude of many of the public in response to the ongoing warnings that the center of the category two hurricane was going to come up Halifax Harbour. It is not unusual for the east coast of North America to experience a dozen hurricanes or significant tropical storms during the annual hurricane season. That is usually between May and November with September being prime time. In the warm water of the Carribean, these storms are quite predictable in their tracking for days; however, in the cold North Atlantic, it is the opposite, frequently changing course and narrowly missing Nova Scotia. Juan did not do that! For six days, the Canadian Hurricane Centre issued repeated warnings that the storm was holding course and would hit us with category two hurricane winds up to 158 km/h with gusts to over 185 km/h.

Juan held his command performance around midnight on September 28th, tearing out transmissions and distribution power lines in a corridor through the center of the Province and across to PEI. It took approximately ten days to have all the power restored and downed trees and wires were everywhere. Two people were killed by falling trees and three died in a house fire where the smoke alarm did not have battery backup. It's amazing that there were not more fatalities as hundreds gathered at the coastline to watch the surf and some actually went in the water. Strangely enough, fears of food poisoning and large numbers of chain saw injuries failed to materialize.

Halifax Regional Municipality requested DND assistance to clear streets and remove trees and the military promptly responded with more then 1100 personnel. They were a great help.

The Joint Emergency Operations Center again proved its worth during the response and the co-location of the three levels of government was a considerable asset. As with any response to a major emergency, there are things that can be improved upon, but none of them were "show stoppers" and there was an excellent atmosphere of co-operation demonstrated by all.

Wind damage is considered one of the basic insurable hazards, so the insurance industry was hard hit by the storm. The fishing industry had considerable losses for equipment and sheds, farm buildings were smashed and wood lots looked as though they were clear cut. The Province announced a disaster financial assistance program almost immediately and a supplemental package for farmers, fishers and wood lot owners was created. This was felt necessary to keep those industries running by putting assistance promptly in the hands of small business.

Hurricane Juan Damage Estimates:
Insurance Industry - $70.5 million
Provincial DFAA Program - $46.8 million (federal) 5.2 million (provincial)
Supplemental NS Program - $8.736 million
**Note:** These figures are <u>not</u> final.

## International Emergency Management Concept

The International Emergency Management Group (IEMG) is made up of the directors of emergency management and emergency measures organizations from the New England States and Eastern Provinces. These jurisdictions have committed to provide mutual aid to each other in the event of a major emergency. The term "compact" is the American version of "memorandum of understanding".

The IEMG met in June, 2003 in Halifax and again in October, 2003 in Portland, Maine, for the ongoing development of standard operating procedures and resource inventories. The primary focus for the past two years has been the expansion of hospital, ambulance and medical resources to respond to major emergencies and reciprocal recognition of professional accreditations.

Arthur Skaling, the Director of EMO (NB) and Canadian co-chair, has retired and Stephen McGrail, the Director of Emergency Management for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, has accepted other employment. Both of these members have added greatly to the IEMG through their leadership and they will certainly be missed.

The next IEMG meeting is scheduled for Charlottetown, PEI in June, 2004 and the fall meeting in Connecticut, USA.

## Disaster Financial Assistance Arrangements

This year, Nova Scotia's Emergency Measures Organization found itself in the unusual (and regrettable) position of managing multiple disaster assistance programs resulting from two events, severe flooding in March and a Hurricane in September.

The two disasters have collectively resulted in more than 2, 200 claims for assistance. The total financial impact is expected to exceed $50,000,000.

Previous disaster events in Nova Scotia were comparatively minor in nature and most of the claims administration and processing were completed using EMO resources with the able assistance of a small group of individuals from the Department of Transportation and Public Works.

In the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Juan, it was clear that in order to manage the anticipated large number of claims for assistance, particularly in the face of the Hurricane's impact on existing EMO resources, a new approach to DFAA administration, using third-party resources, would be necessary. Contracts were subsequently completed with the Canadian Independent Adjusters Association (CIAA) and a third-party insurance adjusting firm (Cunningham Lindsay) to provide services for DFAA claims receipt, investigation and adjudication. A separate office location in Halifax was established, furnished and staffed within days of the Hurricane, to administer the DFAA program.

To attempt to better manage the expectations of applicants for assistance, EMO also introduced a new application process for DFAA using trained customer service representatives located in a number of convenient sites across the Province. This enabled staff to meet with and assist applicants both in understanding the eligibility criteria and completing the application for assistance. This improved process is showing great promise in reducing the percentage of assistance claims that have been declined in previous programs due to ineligibility with the Federal Government's rules.

The Government of Nova Scotia feels that the present rules of eligibility imposed by the Federal Government, place severe limitations on the ability of the Province to serve the needs of Nova Scotians who are impacted by a disaster. Accordingly, for Hurricane Juan, the Province implemented its own disaster program for the forestry, farming and fishery sectors. The cost of the program is estimated to be $10,000,000.

The Province of Nova Scotia will be actively pursuing negotiations with the Federal Government, to seek progressive changes to the Federal DFA arrangements so that in the future, the arrangements will provide a greater and more appropriate level of disaster assistance to Nova Scotians in need. The Province looks forward to working with its Provincial and Territorial colleagues towards that end.

## Joint Emergency Preparedness Program

The Joint Emergency Preparedness Program (JEPP) cost-shares emergency preparedness activities between federal and provincial/territorial governments. The amount of funding is based on a per-capita population formula. In 2003-04, the JEPP funding envelope for Nova Scotia was $202,000. These funds were allocated to partly fund staff positions, municipal emergency preparedness projects, and basic and advanced emergency training as well as the ongoing development of the Joint Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

Staff positions included the Federal Provincial Liaison Officer and the Training Officer at EMO headquarters. These two positions accounted for 35 per cent of the JEPP funding.

Training courses have become an important part of EMO's emergency preparedness activities. The course offerings include basic emergency preparedness (BEP), an advanced course in emergency operations centre (EOC) management and will soon include an emergency site management (ESM) course. For 2003-04, 23 per cent of JEPP funds were used to support running the BEP and EOC courses throughout the Province. It is anticipated that for the next fiscal year, the number of training courses offered will expand to meet an increasing demand from municipalities.

Eight municipal projects totaling $47,851 in federal contributions, or 24% of the JEPP budget were identified for funding in 2003-04. These projects are cost-shared with the municipalities on a 50/50 basis and are used to increase emergency preparedness capacity at a municipal level. Projects included generators for emergency relocation centres, communications equipment for a municipal emergency measures organization, equipment purchases for a regional EOC and equipment for a hazardous materials response unit. The amount available to fund municipal projects varies from year to year. As municipalities evaluate the lessons learned from Hurricane Juan, it is expected that requests for generators and EOC equipment will increase in 2004-05. There is tension between this demand, the limited amount of municipal funding available and the $10,000 funding cap that the federal government has placed on generator acquisitions.

A project to enhance the interoperability of six regional chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) response teams was approved late in 2003. This JEPP funding of $30,000 (14 per cent of the funding envelope) had been submitted in the previous year and was not approved. However, projects were identified by the CBRN teams and will be funded on a 50/50 basis either with the teams themselves or their respective municipalities.

Finally, 4 per cent of JEPP funds were allocated towards the ongoing development of the Province's Joint Emergency Operations Centre (JEOC). These projects include hardware upgrades and improvements to the JEOC's operating environment.

## EMO Training

Throughout 2003, the demand for emergency preparedness training has continued to grow, and this interest has spread not only through the public sector but into the private sector as well. The demand for this training has increased to the point where we need to look at alternate avenues for delivery. We have added additional training courses to meet the needs of our clients, while at the same time initiating the development stages of higher level courses for emergency management. To this end, the training officer sits on the National Emergency Management Training Committee, who's new task is to develop the National Recovery Management training course.

In the world of emergency preparedness training, the events of 2003 have created unprecedented interest in our Basic Emergency Preparedness Training Program. This three-day training session is designed to provide those persons responsible for providing a prompt and coordinated response to an emergency, with preliminary information and basic training that is required to understand and implement effective emergency response in their jurisdiction. This course also serves as the gateway for additional advanced level training courses related to emergency response and management. In 2003, EMO(NS) successfully conducted eight (8) Basic Emergency Preparedness Training Courses in the following locations with an average class size of 33: Dartmouth (3), Port Hood, Amherst, Middleton, Sydney (2).

An Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) course was conducted in Dartmouth in conjunction with the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College (CEPC) in March 2003. Thirty-two students participated and it was deemed by the students and instructing staff to be very successful. EMO (NS) will continue to conduct the EOC course in the coming year.

Nova Scotia sent a number of people to the Canadian Emergency Preparedness College (CEPC) in Arnprior, Ontario, for advanced level training courses. In total, 12 candidates attended; 4 on the EOC course, 7 on the Emergency Site Management (ESM) and 1 completed training in Emergency Public Information (EPI).

In other training related activities, EMO (NS) again conducted a very successful two-day conference and training session for municipal Emergency Measures Coordinators (EMCs) in May.

Finally, in November at the annual EMO (NS) staff conference, a decision was made to offer a one day Emergency Awareness Training Course to volunteers in addition to further developing the Emergency Site Management course in 2004.

## Regional Emergency Measures Organizations (REMO)

Regional Emergency Measures Organizations (REMO) is the merging of municipal units for the purpose of managing an emergency and thus ensuring a coordinated prompt response. The REMO has one plan and one Emergency Measures Coordinator with a designated alternate.

EMO(NS) Central Zone currently has one REMO which consists of Colchester County, Town of Truro, and the Town of Stewiacke. We are also in the final stages of having a REMO in place which will see the merging of Pictou County, and the Towns of New Glasgow, Stellarton, Westville, Trenton and Pictou. Discussions are also underway with some of the municipal units in Cumberland County to look at the value of creating a REMO in their area.

## Ground Search and Rescue

The Nova Scotia volunteer ground search and rescue program continues to provide a valuable service to EMO(NS), police authorities and municipal emergency measures organizations

The Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association (NSGSARA) provides governance to the 24 search teams with approximately 1600 trained volunteers. A training standards committee forms part of this association which regulates minimum training standards for all ground search and rescue volunteers. The minimum standards are in place at all levels from the probationary searcher through to the search manager.

Lost or missing person incidents are police investigations to which the volunteer search and rescue teams continue to provide a professional service. Lost or missing call outs are categorized as children, hunters, fishermen, despondents, outdoor enthusiasts and others. Despondents include Alzheimer patients, elopements from special care facilities and depression.

Statistical information supporting these responses in 2003 are as follows:1857 ground search and rescue volunteers dedicated 20,808 hours searching for 62 lost persons in the following categories: children (5), hunters (4), fishermen (6), despondents (26) outdoor enthusiasts (12) and others (9).

Police departments have also called upon the trained ground search and rescue volunteers to assist with various police investigations, such as evidence searches and evacuations. This assistance reflects 17 call outs utilizing 217 volunteers for 1567 hours.

Events such as the March floods and hurricane Juan have necessitated an increased use of the ground search and rescue volunteers by Municipal Emergency Measures Organizations throughout the Province. The volunteers come equipped with professionalism in dealing with persons in peril, specialized equipment and self

sufficiency.

A memorandum of understanding between Parks Canada, the Ground Search and Rescue Association and RCMP has been approved by these agencies and respective legal branches. The actual signing will take place early in 2004.

We are also working on a memorandum of understanding between the above agencies and the municipal police services throughout the Province.

## SARSCENE 2003

Sarscene, is an international conference and trade show recognizing search and rescue efforts from around the world. The conference is a medium for governments, professional search and rescue persons, police agencies, military and civilian volunteers to network, understand, and improve their search and rescue skills. Nova Scotia has long been recognized as a lead agency in the search and rescue world.

SARSCENE 2003 was held in Kingston, Ontario with Nova Scotia representation from EMO(NS), RCMP and the Nova Scotia Ground Search and Rescue Association. Nova Scotia's voice was heard concerning the lack of interoperability of our respective radio communication systems, be it police, government, military or volunteer; an issue the Executive Director of EMO(NS) has identified and proposed through the conference.

The Executive Director of EMO(NS) is also the chairman of the Ground Search and Rescue Council. A National committee dealing with search and rescue issues throughout Canada.

## Emergency Preparedness Week

The 2003 Emergency Preparedness (EP) Week theme - Prepare Now! Learn How! - was designed to emphasize the importance of taking steps to improve preparedness at all levels, especially for individuals and families.

An EP week committee was formed with representatives from 11 organizations including all three levels of government, as well as the private and non-profit sectors. Over the last two years, a lot of effort was put into improving the number of EP Week activities in Nova Scotia and we were once again pleased with the success of the program.

During EP Week, May 4-10, some activities undertaken included:

- EMO (NS) sent an information kit to all 55 municipalities in the Province, providing them with materials to hold EP week events in their own communities. A number of municipalities responded by hosting open houses, issuing proclamations, distributing emergency preparedness bookmarks, brochures and posters, visiting local schools and talking with local media.

- Feature articles and EP week posters were distributed to provincial departments.
- Feature articles were developed and sent to provincial media and other interest groups for three consecutive weeks leading up to EP week.
- Our Premier and Minister responsible for Emergency Measures issued a proclamation.
- EMO presented the Red Cross and Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary with plaques to be mounted on our "Wall of Honor"
- A province-wide news release was sent to all media, which highlighted the EP week theme and events that were taking place.
- Several TV and radio interviews were conducted during EP Week.
- The Atlantic chapter of the Canadian Emergency Preparedness Association hosted a video conference workshop.
- The Special Care Emergency Preparedness Association hosted a two-day emergency planning seminar.
- Regional Red Cross staff attended mall displays and public events advocating emergency preparedness.
- Aliant distributed EP week posters throughout its buildings and posted an emergency preparedness message on its intranet. The company also developed a bookmark with which was distributed with pay stubs to approx. 12,000 Aliant employees.

EP Week activities were well received by both media and targeted interest groups throughout Nova Scotia. Planning is already underway for EP Week 2004.

## 911 Emergency Reporting System

The year 2003 saw not only the progression of on-going projects which will provide many benefits to Nova Scotia's 911 System, but also several technological enhancements which positively impacted 911 cellular callers in particular.

There were approximately 187,000 calls to 911 in the past year, 35 per cent of which were from cellular phones. The previous year's statistics showed that approximately 30 per cent of the calls to 911 were from cellular phones. Recognizing this increasing trend in cell phone use, Aliant, who is a partner with the Province in the operation of the 911 System, made an application to the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) to install new software on their cellular switch. This software upgrade would provide the 911 Call Taker the call back phone number of the cellular caller in addition to the currently displayed address of the cell tower. This technology is referred to as "Phase 1 Routing". In November 2003, the CRTC approved Aliant's application and by the end of December 2003, Phase 1 technology was installed in two of the Province's six answering points. The remaining four answering points will be completed by the end of April 2004.

Another significant improvement that took place in the past year was that all cellular callers to 911 now route directly to a 911 answering point. Previous to July 2003, when Rogers Wireless customers dialed 911, they initially reached an Aliant operator, who then routed their call to a 911 call centre. Recognizing the potential dangers of this

situation continuing, Rogers Wireless worked with EMO(NS) to institute technology whereby their cellular customer will bypass the Aliant operator and route directly to a 911 call centre. The process by which this is done is termed "Trunk Billing Routing". It will be a goal of EMO (NS) to work with Rogers Wireless to introduce "Phase 1 Routing" for their customers in the upcoming fiscal year.

The past year has also seen many improvements to 911 civic addressing. The municipal units in Nova Scotia have continued to assist EMO (NS) and Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations in their work on completing a Province wide digital mapping project. The Nova Scotia Civic Address File (NSCAF), when completed, will provide EMO (NS) with a Province-wide digital map that will include civic numbers, road names, community names, county boundaries, and emergency service boundaries. Having critical information such as civic addresses in a digital format will greatly help 911 Call Takers and emergency responders in locating emergencies . Not only will Call Takers and emergency agencies be provided with a 'snapshot' of where the emergency is taking place, but everyone will have access to the same information, thus lessening the possibility for confusion.

The NSCAF project has strengthened ties between EMO (NS) and the municipalities in the Province. During 2003, audits of road network data and emergency response boundaries took place in order to improve the quality of the civic addressing data in the 911 system. The two major phone service providers in the Province are also fully participating in the NSCAF project by providing vital data in order to perform more effective audits. In addition to this, the Civic Addressing Coordinator had the opportunity over the past year to meet with several municipalities to share ideas and see first hand how they administer their municipal civic addressing programs.

EMO (NS) continued its partnership with Transportation and Public Works in the Distance Marker Program. In 2003, Highway 104 from the New Brunswick border to Aulds Cove was completed. These distance markers have proven to be of great assistance to both 911 callers and 911 Call Takers, in terms of accurately determining the caller's location. These signs are posted at one kilometre intervals, and contain vital information for 911 callers, such as the highway name and the direction of travel.

Offering refresher training to 911 Call Takers was the focus of the 911 Trainer in 2003. Our goal is to refresh 50 per cent of staff each year. Call Takers were offered refresher training on a number of important features of the Positron equipment and a complete review of the Standard Operating Procedures. Refresher training also concentrated on (1) assisting hearing and/or speech impaired callers to 911, and (2) the redundant back up systems in place, so that in the event of a failure of any component of the 911 system, 911 calls can still be handled without interruption.

In 2003 the 911 Trainer delivered training on the new provincial Domestic Violence Intervention Legislation to 911 Call Takers. In addition to this, eight new 911 Call Takers from across the Province were trained to take and process 911 calls, bringing the total compliment of active Call Takers in Nova Scotia to 146.

The 911 Training Officer completed her certification in 2003 to deliver training in the Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training (ASIST) program and is preparing to offer this important training to 911 Call Takers in the upcoming fiscal year.

The 911 team from EMO (NS) participated in a major Canadian conference this year. The Association of Public Safety Communications Officials (APCO), held their 2003 Canadian Conference in Halifax at the World Trade and Convention Centre in October. EMO (NS) staff was involved at the organizational level, at the trade show and in delivery of a plenary session. This was a major professional development and networking event for all 911 staff in the Province, and an opportunity to showcase Nova Scotia's 911 system as a leader in North America.

Over the last year a lot of effort has been spent increasing 911's public education initiatives. All educational materials have been updated to better reflect some of our key messages. Improved education in the schools was identified as a major initiative for 2003. To accomplish this the 911 teacher's kit was updated and made available to all primary to grade 3 teacher's as well as a set of flash cards were developed in partnership with Aliant. EMO staff, Call Takers and Community Policing Officers offered their services to go into schools and give a presentation on the proper use of 911.

Other education initiatives included a distance marker campaign, to make the general public more aware of what the distance markers are and how they can get help to an emergency faster and a wireless education campaign was initiated with Aliant, Rogers and Telus. The key outcome of this committee was to develop materials aimed at discouraging the preprogramming of 911 into cell phones. A poster to display in all dedicated cellular stores was created and will be displayed in early 2004.